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REMINISCENCES OF A PARISIAN BOARDING-SCHOOL.

(BY A LADY.)

The word boarding-school is one that, like some others, gives me very mixed feelings of pain and pleasure; I can hardly tell which predominates as I recall the hours passed in Mad^{me}. R——e's 'pension' for young ladies: yet nothing could be more inviting than the prospectus which detailed the advantages to be derived from a sojourn in her establishment; strict attention to religion and comfort, accomplishments of every kind to be imparted by the best masters in the capital, a polished family circle to which the boarders were admitted, a splendid house and garden, &c. &c.; and to crown all, the Hotel de Montmorenci was situated in "La rue Mont Parnasse," close to "Les jardins du Luxembourg." The Hotel de Montmorenci in la rue Mont Parnasse!—could any thing read better? there was magic and poetry in the very sound! Besides Mad^{me}. R——e had been a long time established, and her school bore a very high character, accordingly it was determined that I could not be better placed than under her care; and one short week after my arrival in Paris, having only had a peep at its enchantments, I drove, rather unwillingly, from our hotel in the gayest and most noisy quarter of this "demoralized metropolis" to the sombre quiet faubourg St. Germain.

The way seemed very long, but at length we arrived at La rue Mont Parnasse, which being very narrow and dirty did not exactly accord with my poetical ideas of 'the muses' hill.' It lay, however, very high, as does every street leading immediately to the suburbs of Paris, the centre of the city being quite sunk into a hollow. Still it did not deserve its lofty name; we stopped at a very large gateway in the middle of a long and high stone wall, over which just appeared the tops of chimneys, the coachman rang sharply, and I thought the bell had a peculiarly loud and awful sound, in an instant the small door of entrance in the large carriage gate flew open as if by magic, for a cord passing from the lock into every porter's lodge in Paris, enables him to admit visitors momentarily, and quite at his own ease. As Mad^{me}. R——e's porter saw that we did not belong to the establishment, he came forth, a fat consequential looking old gentleman, to ask what we wanted, and to our enquiries replied that Madame was at home, and at the same time ringing a bell which communicated with the house, desired us to walk in.

The hotel, standing in the middle of a large paved court yard, with high steps leading up to the door, on each side of which stood a large statue, had a very dignified appearance, and altogether did not disappoint my expectations; it had once belonged to the noble family of Montmorenci.

A smart smiling femme de chambre met us at the door, as she conducted us up the broad marble steps of the staircase I heard the mingled sounds of three or four pianos, a harp, and two or three voices practising sol, fas; I heard them with a sigh, for boarding-school music always produces in my mind a feeling like that which I experience when listening to the melody of the caged denizens of the air. Through an antechamber on the first landing place, whose floor of black and white marble squares felt delightfully cool on a warm Autumn day, we were ushered into a vast and lofty saloon, and into the presence of

Mad^{me}. R——e; she bore little resemblance to a French woman in person or manners; the former was very tall, thin, and upright, although her age (may I mention a lady's age, most gallant president?) was at least sixty; the latter stiff and reserved, and although the day *was* so warm, entirely too cold to please me, yet she was a very worthy woman, and I blamed myself afterwards for having yielded too readily to first impressions with regard to her. She evidently wished to be gracious, and terms and accommodation were soon arranged, so that in two days more I became an inmate of Mad^{me}. R——e's 'pension,' and a participator in all the advantages, instruction, comforts, and discomforts, to be derived from the system on which it was conducted. The boarders were about forty in number, and nearly one half were English. I found this little empire divided into two factions, at the head of which were the two principal governesses, Mad^{me}. Bocage, and Mad^{elle}. Zelig R——e. The former was, in my eyes, a charming woman, not yet more than twenty-four years of age; she had been left a widow with two little children, after having suffered all the pangs that can be inflicted by a union with a heartless extravagant and unprincipled young man, whom she loved, in spite of all his faults, too well; she was married at an early age, and though she had been an heiress, her spendthrift husband left her, at his decease, so scantily provided for, that she was happy, for the sake of her young daughters, to become a governess in Mad^{me}. R——e's 'pension,' where she herself had been educated. Some wealthy relations had offered her an asylum, but she could not bear the idea of that worst of all dependance. Zelig R——e was niece to Mad^{me}. R——e, who had no daughters, and, a rare circumstance in France, was unmarried at the age of thirty; she was little, very plain in person, inquisitive, shrewd, and self-sufficient, some added ill-natured, but her influence in the family was predominant, and those who were prudent enough to secure Zelig's good graces, were sure of Mad^{me}. R——e's countenance, who was too old to make many inquiries into the state of affairs, but received all reports through the medium of what we styled the two prime ministers.

Between Zelig and Madame Bocage was a decided enmity, and all who disliked the former, and loved gentleness and kindness, sided with Madame Bocage; how this hostility arose I never could rightly learn, perhaps from dissimilarity of character, perhaps from clashing interests and the rivalry of office, certainly Madame Bocage did not encourage it, but she could not prevent the school girls from using her name as a kind of war-cry against Zelig's partisans. I chose my party the moment I caught the expressive glance of the young widow's beautiful dark eyes, so melancholy, so tender, and so intellectual, when sometimes, though rarely, they sparkled beneath their long silken lashes, with a brightness that spoke of what she had been in happier days.

The eyes are decidedly a wonderful feature. I have always fancied that they contain more of the soul than any other part of the human frame. There is a good deal of resemblance, by the bye, between French and Irish eyes.

In the construction of the hotel, as is too often the case on the Continent, comfort had been sacrificed to appearance; there were a few splendid rooms, and a number which deserved rather the name of closets, from their darkness and diminutive size, but as most of the English girls who were above the age of fifteen stipulated to be allowed a room, or half a room, to themselves, they were happy in obtaining a place in

one of those closets. The general dormitory was indeed a very fine and spacious apartment, but young ladies would feel their dignity quite lowered by having but one apartment in common with children; and after all, it is perhaps desirable that they should each possess a singular apartment when not bound together by the ties of consanguinity. On either side of the porte-cochère, or carriage door into the court yard, stood what had once been the stables and coach-houses of the noble 'Ducs de Montmorenci,' now elevated to a far nobler use, and converted into little rooms with red tiled floors, highly waxed and polished, and destined to receive those parlour boarders for whom a place could not be found in the large edifice; there walls that once echoed only to the heavy tramp of horse hooves, or the coarse accents of their grooms, now rang to the sweeter sounds of ladies' voices, and from their present appearance it was difficult to believe what they had formerly been.

In these ci-devant stables I was lucky enough to be installed, ('pon my word I did not mean to pun, I think a lady never should do any thing so naughty,) and in a few days was pretty well acquainted with all my fair neighbours, "*Les demoiselles en chambres*," as they were called. In truth we were a very gay set, and many a delightful evening we have passed at what we called our soirées, to dignify them, which were little pic nic parties given in one of the rooms that was rather larger than the rest, where the young ladies could at their ease drink tea, made '*à l'Anglaise*,' strong enough to give Madame R——e, '*un attaque de nerfs*' at the very sight, whilst quite '*à l'Anglaise*,' they expressed the utmost detestation and abhorrence of every thing French. There were a few however who did not join in this universal censure of "*La belle France*," and I was one. Of course these coteries were almost always composed of English girls, but occasionally a few French favorites were admitted. But alas! pleasure has but the life of a butterfly: Madame R——e discovered that our meetings were sometimes protracted to an unseasonable hour, a curfew (*couvre-feu*) law was put in force, and a nightly round made at half past ten in our '*quartier*,' to see that all the "*demoiselles en chambres*," were in their chambers.

At this moment the forms and features of all who occupied the rooms of that corridor, recur as forcibly to my mind's eye as if they were present; one by one they rise in fair array, nor can I suppress a sigh for each, at the reflection that excepting two or three I shall never in all probability behold them again; I wish I could sketch each form ere it fades from my mind.

Elizabeth Ferrars, who shared my apartment, was a little plump '*blonde*,' with laughing blue eyes, in which played at times a glance of triumphant archness that was almost malicious, when she discovered something ridiculous in those about her, or by some droll and naïve expression quite disconcerted an opponent in argument or conversation. I found her a very pleasant companion, her spirits were light as her bounding step, and her conversation, though rather too satirical, was original, and of course amusing; she was a girl who under the externals of frivolity and gaiety, concealed a strong mind and feelings, and a decided character.

Her father, a London merchant, had at his death left her, his only child, a considerable property, and I am inclined to think the young lady's guardians sent her to France for a few years, to efface the impression a certain cousin Charles seemed to have made upon her mind; but that I fancy was not so easy a matter. She was about seventeen.

The room opposite was occupied by Sarah Davis, a Welsh damsel, not unlike Miss Ferrars in appearance, but very dissimilar in her subdued precise expression of countenance. She was called by the girls "the little Welsh saint," and certainly she was a very good girl, though rather dull about learning the French language, which she converted into a very barbarous and extraordinary dialect, to the great delight and amusement of Elizabeth Ferrars, between whom and Miss Davis there existed a decided aversion.

On the left side of ours was the apartment of Agnes Sydney, a tall gentle creature, mild, melancholy, and interesting, who from her great height, and a certain graceful bending of a very long neck, was universally termed in the school, *La Giraffe*, for that beautiful animal was just then the object of universal attention; there must have been a likeness, for I have heard her so called as we went through the streets to church. Agnes had quite recently lost a dearly loved brother, and her anxious parents seeing her droop in the scenes that recalled her loss too forcibly to her mind, had sent her to Paris, hoping she would there improve both in health and accomplishments. A cousin named Miss Crowe accompanied her, she was of a certain age, and as spinsters of a certain age are somewhat apt to be, rather unamiable.

Our right hand neighbour, Jane Burney, was a young Scotch girl, remarkable for nothing but practising the harp, and singing from morning 'till night, without an ear for music, and with a false and squeaking voice. It was a strange infatuation, yet perseverance does so much that she succeeded in playing better than any of her competitors, as far as execution went, and made a very respectable figure every Thursday evening at Mad^{me}. R——e's soirées, at which the entertainment consisted of music given by pupils who were most proficient in that art, and the refreshments of tea and "eau sucrée:" the former for the English, the latter to please the French palates.

All the boarders, great and little, as the clock struck seven each successive Thursday, were ushered into the grand saloon in their best dresses, there to take their places on chairs ranged round close to the wall, 'till the 'pendule' on the chimney piece struck nine, and I can answer for many an anxious weary glance being cast on its gilded face by the greater part of the little girls, who evidently did not consider sugar and water, and tea, a sufficient compensation for being obliged to speak below their breath, nor the harmony with which they were regaled a due return for the want of locomotion.

Mad^{me}. R——e had three sons who regularly attended these soirées, the eldest, a bookseller, was named "Alexis Justien," the two younger brothers, both engineer officers, bore the names of "Auguste Phocien," and "Aristide Julien," these lofty and dignified appellations were far from being appropriate to the appearance of those who rejoiced in them, to which none of these significant epithets could justly be applied; as to their mental qualifications I can say nothing, for of course they would have thought it a shocking breach of decorum to address a single word to any of their mother's boarders. Yet some of the young ladies considered them quite charming. They sometimes sang duets and glees, which I did not much admire as there were not three good notes to be found in the three voices. The French say, that to become a good singer a good voice is not wanting, but solely taste and expression; I have so often heard parents say "Mon fils" (or "ma fille") "n'a pas beaucoup de voix, *mais il chante avec un gout! une expression!*" Taste and expression may half constitute a fine singer, but

I cannot help thinking a fine voice not amiss, by way of accompaniment. It is strange that a sweet and powerful voice is even more rare in France than a handsome face, and that is rare enough; there may be something unfavorable to a vocalist in the language, which is so nasal, but you perceive the same deficiency in quality or quantity of voice, when attempting Italian compositions. We often hear tones in our streets, so rich in mellow sweetness and power, that like a fine instrument struck by a rude unskilful hand, they excite a feeling of regret that they should be so misused, but in the streets of Paris I never heard *one* street singer whose voice was better than a scream. It must be something in the conformation of their lungs.

Mons^r. R——e was a great favorite in the ‘pension,’ he was a little vivacious old man, a complete contrast to ‘Madame’ in every thing, all smiles and animation; to hear him speak, you would not suppose he was more than twenty-five; he was said to have been remarkable for personal beauty in his youth, and for charming curling chesnut hair, but time, ruthless time, had not left the smallest trace of the former on his little wrinkled face, nor one solitary hair on his bald head. Time and space are so closely connected in my mind, that having mentioned one, reminds me there are certain boundaries set to the other, which were I to indulge “*ad libitum*” in my reminiscences might perchance be overstepped.

Recollection is a strange wayward faculty, you may sometimes vainly endeavour to recall names and circumstances, they only tantalize you, and mock all your most strenuous endeavours, but more frequently you find yourself in the case of a magician who has employed inadvertently too powerful a spell; a few words, a single idea, will recall a host of recollections that come thronging in upon your mind in such crowds that you actually do not know where to place, or how to employ them, and you sink overpowered by too much riches.

Mtta. S.

SONNET.

TO FRANCE, ARMING FOR LIBERTY.

Surely thy heart hath Briton blood, and graced
Art thou with limbs of that heroic mould;
Thy lion-port's as proud; thy voice as bold
In generous defiance: now, at last,
Thy wrongs are numbered; and the die is cast
For death! for death or victory! Thou dost hold
Communion with th' undying great of old,
Tyrannicides, earth-worshipped as they passed:
But hark! the strife augments—O, Liberty!
We hear thy groans, we feel the earthquake shocks
Of thy great agonies—all nature rocks—
And we—great God of battles! where are we?
Forward! no craven lip shall preach us down—
We scorn alike the despot's blandishment or frown!

A. de V.

August, 10th 1830.